

# Ostinato Studies

## Part 1: The Building Blocks

by Jason Gianni

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**MUSIC KEY**

From the groundbreaking work of jazz giant Max Roach—notably his 1966 gem “The Drum Also Waltzes”—to Terry Bozzio’s jaw-dropping video series *Melodic Drumming and the Ostinato* and the forward-thinking ideas of many other contemporary drummers,

including Grant Collins, Mike Mangini, Steve Smith, Thomas Lang, Benny Greb, and Marco Minnemann, the drumset has gradually emerged out of the background as a support instrument and into the spotlight as a viable solo voice. This series of articles focuses on some modern multi-pedal techniques that can be used to great effect.

To begin, it’s important to understand that drumming over an ostinato (a repeated pattern) can be divided into two categories: stylistic uses, like Afro-Cuban left-foot clave and right-foot tumbao, and soloing ideas built from any rhythmic combination played by various limbs. The examples in this article can be applied to either approach, but we’ll focus on the latter category.

A few months ago I produced a five-part video titled “Polyrhythm & Ostinato” that has gotten a lot of exposure on YouTube and at [paiste.com](http://paiste.com) and [vicfirth.com](http://vicfirth.com). I’ve since received a lot of questions regarding how the video was put together and where I came up with my ideas. Here, I’m going to break down one of the topics—constructing hand solo ideas over a consistent foot ostinato. You can view the segment of the video that we’re discussing on the Education page at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).

### Soloing Over a Multi-Pedal Foot Ostinato

The following foot ostinato is a simple pattern that involves two pedals (hi-hat and bass drum). We will eventually move this pattern to four pedals.

1

The most logical way to begin soloing with the hands on top of the foot pattern is to play a consistent stream of 16th notes. Start with no accents, and make sure your hands and feet land together accurately.

2

Now begin to add accents. The following accents are taken from measure 1 on page 38 of Ted Reed’s classic book *Syncopation*. Once you have this phrase down, move through the rest of the page, one measure at a time. Here’s the accent pattern.

3

This is what the accent pattern looks like when played within consistent 16th notes over the foot ostinato.

4

For more creative and technical accent patterns, try taking the same approach with the rhythm melodies found in Gary Chester’s legendary book *The New Breed*. The following accents are taken from measure 1 on page 16.

5

When they’re played within consistent 16th notes in the hands, the accents (mixed with the foot ostinato) will look like the following. Practice this example, and then move through the rest of the page in *The New Breed* measure by measure.

6

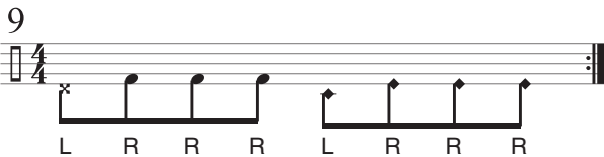
Now change the unaccented notes to double strokes.

7

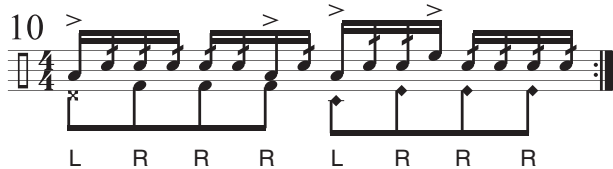
From here you can begin to orchestrate your accents on different surfaces. For starters, try playing right-hand accents on the floor tom and left-hand accents on the high tom. (Reverse that if you’re left-handed.) The double strokes will remain on the snare.

8

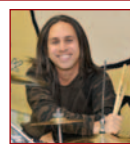
Finally, you can start expanding the surfaces you're using to play the foot ostinato. When you place alternate pedals to the right of your bass drum pedal and to the left of your hi-hat, you can play the ostinato as a four-pedal pattern.



Now go back and repeat all of the previous examples using a multi-pedal ostinato. Here's what Example 7 looks when played this way.



In the next part of this series I'll show you how to create metric modulations and polymetric phrases on top of a continuous ostinato. Stay tuned, and practice up!



**Jason Gianni** is a full-time faculty member at Drummers Collective in New York City and a coauthor of the acclaimed instructional book *The Drummer's Bible*. For more information, visit [jasongianni.com](http://jasongianni.com).



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